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Kenya Birds

Volume 2, Number 1 June 1993

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and the Kenya Section of BirdLife International.

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Editorial

First of all, a big thank-you to all those readers who have sent in their subscriptions to *Kenya Birds*. We greatly appreciate your support. To make the magazine a success, however, we need not only subscribers but material. So please keep sending in your records, notes and articles, whether long or short. We also need additional bird artists to come to our assistance with pen-and-ink drawings.

Records are always particularly welcome. We may not be able to publish every one due to the limited space available, but *all* records help to build a better picture of where our birds are, and when. We expect the bird distribution database to be up and running soon on a computer in the Dept. Ornithology, and all the records received for *Kenya Birds* will be entered there. Standard recording forms will follow, but in the meantime you can greatly improve the usefulness of your records by making sure you include the following information: the ATLAS SQUARE, LATITUDE and LONGITUDE (as precise as possible), ALTITUDE and some indication of the HABITAT. The DATE and OBSERVER are obviously necessary, as is the SPECIES — but you might be surprised what some absent-minded observers send in!

Plans are now well underway for the big International Birdwatch on 9–10 October. Many thanks to all who have contacted the organisers about it: they will be in touch with you very soon. In the meantime, there are a lot of birders out there who have not responded. Remember that everyone can take part in this event. It's not just for the so-called 'experts', and it doesn't really matter whether or not you can tell an Olive Thrush from a Robin Chat (so long as you only record the birds you *can* identify). So if you are interested but holding back — do be in touch (see the back page for contacts).

In this issue we take a tour of the central Rift Valley, around Lake Naivasha and Hell's Gate. The Elsa Conservation Trust has a particular interest in this area, and we wish to acknowledge with thanks their sponsorship of this issue. In the next issue we head west to the damp, dripping and bird-rich Kakamega Forest. Good birding!

Subscription Rates (1 year)

	EAHNS members	Non–members
Kenya	KSh 120/–	KSh 200/–
Elsewhere (air mail)	UK £6.00	UK £7.50

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Front cover illustration: Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* from a vignette by Simon Thomsett. Typesetting and layout: National Museums of Kenya and Fleur Ng'weno. Printed by National Museums of Kenya.

News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

Long march around Lake Ol Tukai

The appearance of Amboseli National Park has changed greatly in recent years, with a large new lake springing up in the centre of the park and continuing to grow. A waterbird survey of Lake Ol Tukai and its associated wetlands, requested by Kenya Wildlife Service, was planned for early February but had to be postponed until 20 March because of extensive flooding in the park. A small team travelled down then with Apollo Kariuki and Richard Tomno of KWS, only to find that most roads around the lake were still underwater. Reassured by Apollo that no lions were in the vicinity, the team ended up walking or wading around the entire lake, which took a muddy day and a half. The effort was worth it as many interesting birds were seen, including around 1,100 White Storks apparently stopping off on their journey home. Full results are available from the Department (Research report no. 12).

Turkana trek

Luca Borghesio from the University of Pavia, Italy, returned to Lake Turkana in March to continue bird survey work begun in a joint project last year. He and Grazia Isoardi walked from Loiyengalani to Allia Bay on the eastern shore, counting waterbirds all the way. The results were disappointing: the lake level is still dropping, and the numbers of birds in all groups (particularly migrants) were substantially lower than in February the year before. Further follow-up work is planned at Turkana this July.

Dandora birds in good shape

As part of the January waterfowl counts a trip was made, along with KWWG volunteers, to the Dandora Sewage Treatment Works on 30 January 1993. The bacterial infection that caused many bird deaths there late last year (see *Kenya Birds* 1(2)) seemed to have resolved itself with the onset of the rains, and all birds appeared healthy. More than 5600 waterbirds of 47 species were recorded during the count, including good numbers of resident and migratory duck, which indicates that Dandora is an important wetland site. Results of the census are available from the Department (Research Report no. 11).

Kakamega forest monitoring

Much of April and May was taken up by fieldwork in Kakamega Forest, where the forest team was collecting data for monitoring purposes under the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Project (KIFCON). The team worked in three sites: Buyangu (in the National Reserve to the north), Lukhusi (in the south-east part of the forest) and Yala (in the south-west). Highlights included finally netting the eponymous *Kakamega poliothorax* (Grey-chested Illadopsis), which surfaced in Buyangu, a number of Toro Olive Greenbuls and a net full of Crested Guineafowl one morning. Turner's Eremomela was seen at every site, and White-spotted and Buff-spotted Pygmy Crakes were calling all over; a female Buff-spotted blundered into one of the nets and was ringed. The team carried out survey work in Yala and Buyangu a year and a half ago; while the condition of Yala appears to be declining fast, Buyangu (which is inside the National Reserve) is improving: a clear indication that forest protection can be effective if properly carried out. We can only wish KIFCON every success in their efforts to conserve this beautiful and endlessly fascinating forest.

White Stork in bird strike

On 11 March 1993 at around 14:00 a Kenya Airways Boeing 737 hit a bird. The aircraft had taken off from Jomo Kenyatta Airport a few minutes before and was about 1700 m above the ground when the accident occurred. The bird came through the main windscreen, injuring the pilot and covering the cockpit with tiny shards of glass. Luckily the co-pilot was able to take over and land the aircraft safely.

All that was left of the bird was a small lump of flesh and bone and a few tiny feathers. The bone turned out to be a piece of the right sternum, and by comparing it with material held in the Dept. Archaeology, technicians George Amutete and Patrick Gichuki confirmed that the bird was a White Stork. This European visitor passes northwards through Kenya at this time of year (see *Ol Tukai*, above). Because the storks are large, slow-moving and travel in big flocks that soar at high altitudes, they pose a considerable danger to aircraft. The Department has long recommended that the airport authorities should use a radar system to detect flocks of migrating birds, as in other countries that are situated under bird flyways.

RTP visits the Bird Room

On 27 January 1993 the Department was honoured with a visit from Roger Tory Peterson, renowned bird artist and inventor of the modern field-guide. He is no stranger to the Museum, having paid his first visit here in 1957.

Bird atlas update

The *Bird Atlas of Kenya*, by Adrian Lewis and Derek Pomeroy, has become an indispensible reference source for bird enthusiasts. A useful feature of the atlas is that it allows one to tell immediately whether a sighting is new and unusual, or whether the bird is 'expected' to be there. Since the atlas compilers closed their files in 1984, there have been many new records in published or unpublished reports. Unfortunately these records are scattered and difficult to keep track of. Departmental staff member Joseph Oyugi has now compiled a Bird Atlas update that includes all available new records from 1984 to June 1993. Copies of the update, which is published as the Department's Research Report no. 15, will be available for a nominal charge from the Department.

BirdLife Kenya

Following ICBP's change of name (see *International News*), ICBP Kenya has become BirdLife Kenya. The group's aims remain exactly the same: to ensure the conservation of Kenya's birds and the habitats they depend on.

Crowned Eagle hide opened

On 9 March 1993 the Ololua Crowned Eagle hide was officially opened by Dr Richard Bagine of the National Museums of Kenya's Centre for Biodiversity. Those attending the ceremony enjoyed a picnic in the open air and delightful views over the forest canopy from the hide. The eagles were not in evidence, but have since begun nest-building again in earnest.

Dr Richard Bagine cutting the ribbon to open the Ololua Crowned Eagle hide as Fredrick Karanja, Head of the Museums' Education Department, looks on.

All those who have visited the hide will agree that it is an excellent tool for conservation education. BirdLife now plans to build additional hides at suitable sites elsewhere in the country. The first of these may be in Embu, where Leslie Brown also studied the Crowned Eagles for many years. An initial fund-raising function was held at the hide on 16 May with Uvumbuzi Clubs, and more such events are planned.

BirdLife supports Hinde's Babbler project

BirdLife Kenya has made a grant of KSh 20,000/= to support a study of the conservation biology of Hinde's Babbler. This little-known threatened species is confined to central Kenya and its population is still declining (see *Kenya Birds* 1(2)). The project will be carried out by Moi University student Peter Njoroge together with the National Museums' Department of Ornithology.

'Winged Metal' dazzles

Those who have visited the last two Bird Art exhibitions will remember the remarkable constructions of so-called 'junk-metal' sculptor Kioko Mwitiki. From 18–31 March Kioko held a one-man show at the Karen Blixen Coffee Garden, sponsored by BirdLife, that displayed sculptures on an ornithological theme. Pieces ranged from extraordinary claw-footed garden furniture and bird tables through magnificently morose Marabous and angry owls. Titled 'Winged Metal', the exhibition displayed assured technique, startling invention and plenty of subtle wit and humour: BirdLife was proud to be associated with it. Kioko has generously donated part of the proceeds for BirdLife's conservation projects, along with a heron sculpture which can be seen on display in the Dept. Ornithology.

EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee

***Scopus* 16(2)**

The most recent issue of *Scopus* (April 1993) contains papers on the birds of Nechisar National Park in Ethiopia; the birds of Kazimzumbwe Forest in Tanzania; the biology of the Grey Parrot; and notes on the endemics and some new species in Pemba. Eleven short communications deal with a variety of birds from Black Ducks to Ankober Serins and Grant's Bluebill.

Kenya Wetlands Working Group

Waterbird numbers down

The January 1993 waterfowl counts took place during a period of unseasonally heavy rain. This did not have much immediate effect on lake levels, but made it impossible to count Lake Magadi as much of the shoreline was inaccessible. In the end, complete counts were carried out at Lakes Naivasha, Elmenteita, Nakuru and Bogoria, combined with training for the volunteer counters — more than 100 people took part this year. Overall numbers of birds were down everywhere, and there were relatively few Palaearctic migrants in evidence. Nakuru was particu-

larly disappointing. Although Lesser Flamingos were present in large numbers (an estimated 750,000), other species (including Greater Flamingos) were relatively very few. The number of migratory birds was more typical of July than January. The results indicate that there was an abundance of the *Spirulina* on which the Lesser Flamingos feed, but few of the invertebrates and fish that other birds depend on. The situation at Nakuru needs careful monitoring.

Relatively few birds were seen at Naivasha, too, although this was probably because of changes in the vegetation. The level of the lake had risen and much of the shoreline was now covered in dense papyrus beds, with fewer open muddy areas for waders. In contrast to most other groups, the numbers of fish-eating birds rose slightly: a healthy sign.

Elmenteita also had few Palaearctic migrants, and few Lesser Flamingo. The Great White Pelicans were also in low numbers: these birds have been breeding on rocky islands in the lake nearly continuously for around three years, up until March 1992. Their departure seems to coincide with a reduction in numbers of fish (and hence fish-eating birds) at Nakuru. Otherwise Elmenteita, which itself now supports a small population of fish, showed a diverse and healthy waterbird community. The hot springs at the southern end of the lake were particularly notable.

Most of Bogoria's Lesser Flamingos appeared to have moved to Nakuru, but around 270,000 were still in evidence. Many of these were young birds, probably born at Lake Natron during October–November the previous year. The relatively small number of flamingos was surprising, since there was so much *Spirulina* in the lake that the water looked like green paint. This was a reminder of how much we still have to find out about flamingos and their movements.

Wetlands inventory making progress

KWWG's pilot inventory project, supported by the Netherlands Government and the East African Wildlife Society, has been making steady progress since the start of the year. The computerised system is now ready for testing with field data. Wetland questionnaires are being prepared, and should be landing in the post-boxes of *Kenya Birds* readers soon. We hope readers will find time to contribute information on wetlands they know well.

Nakuru Research Workshop

Together with Kenya Wildlife Service and the World Wide Fund for Nature, KWWG hosted a weekend workshop on research and monitoring at Lake Nakuru on 29–30 May 1993. The idea was to bring together those undertaking or planning research on the lake to establish a set of priorities and a way to coordinate efforts. Thirty scientists and managers from a variety of institutions

attended. Work that was identified as urgent included sampling of river and effluent flows for pollutants and silts; monitoring of flamingo numbers and movements (at Nakuru and elsewhere in the Rift); looking at the number of visitors and their impacts; and several important studies of landuse and pollution in the catchment. Delegates were surprised to learn that the hydrogeology of the lake remains largely a mystery: as so often in the Rift Valley, there is much more to it than meets the eye. For effective conservation of the lake it is obviously vital to know where its water comes from and goes to, and this work was also identified as urgent. The workshop gave its strong support for continuation of the present twice-yearly waterfowl counts, and for further study of waterbirds that breed around the lake.

Flamingos face uncertain future

Threats to the Lesser Flamingo's main breeding ground, Lake Natron, are multiplying. Past issues of *Kenya Birds* reported on the planned Ewaso Ngiro hydropower scheme in Kenya. Now a French consortium is planning a large project to extract soda from the lake in Tanzania. This would be similar to the factory at Lake Magadi, involving a large processing plant, a town and associated roads, and heavy machinery on the lake to chew into the soda and pipe it to the shore. The proposed extraction site happens to be bang in the middle of one of the main flamingo nesting colonies, but in fact almost everywhere in the southern part of Lake Natron is vital to flamingo breeding at one stage or another. The factory and associated developments would have a large appetite for the limited amount of freshwater available in the area, and thus directly disrupt the livelihood of local people. Strangely, the plan is being put forward at a time when the world market for soda has slumped. KWWG has written to the Wildlife Society of Tanzania to express its concerns, in the hope that they will ask the authorities to carry out a proper Environmental Impact Assessment. Needless to say, the Lesser Flamingo as a species is worth an enormous amount in economic terms to both Tanzania and Kenya.

On a more positive note, a Japanese-funded project has now begun to upgrade the sewage treatment works at Lake Nakuru. The present works are severely overloaded and there has been much concern at the quality of effluent reaching the lake.

With increasing threats to the Lesser Flamingo's breeding and feeding sites, the need to monitor populations over the whole region is becoming clear. Together with the International Wetlands and Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), KWWG is planning to host a major regional meeting on flamingos in November this year. The venue, appropriately enough, will be Nakuru.

Ol'Bolossat subdivided

Lake Ol'Bolossat and its associated swamps form a long narrow wetland lying in a valley just south of Nyahururu. This unique wetland forms a very important breeding area for several bird species, including the Red-knobbed Coot, African Jacana and African Snipe. It also plays a vital role in the hydrology of the northern Ewaso Nyiro river. The swamps control the flow of excess water in the rainy seasons and gradually release it through springs in the dry seasons. For several years the Kenya Wildlife Service has been drawing up plans to gazette the area as a National Reserve. Thus it came as a shock in April this year when KWWG discovered that a large part of the wetland had been allocated to unknown persons, and that surveyors were busy fixing boundary lines on the plots. The area was dry after a long period without rain, otherwise the plots would have been underwater. One or two buildings had already been put up, and some plots had been fenced and ploughed. Sadly, the areas so far allocated are in the part of the swamp most important for breeding birds.

The local people are also dismayed at this, since the allocations mean they will no longer be able to use the wetland for grazing and watering their cattle: those being settled are not from the area. In fact, the lake basin is already overcrowded, and unwise use has been causing degradation of the catchment and the swamps. This new settlement will greatly intensify this. It will largely destroy the swamps' biological diversity and lead to major changes in the flow of the Ewaso Ngiro, which in turn will affect people, forests and wildlife downstream. The fragile wetland soils are also not likely to support intensive cultivation for more than a few seasons. Altogether what is taking place is a disaster, and appears a classic example of political expediency taking precedence over environmental considerations. Despite KWWG's efforts, it seems unlikely that conversion of the wetland can now be stopped.

International

ICBP changes its name

On 3 March 1993 the International Council for Bird Preservation officially changed its name (for all but legal purposes) to BirdLife International. The new name parallels a change in structure, so that BirdLife will now be working mainly through partner organisations — other conservation NGOs — around the world. Local reaction to the new name has been mixed, but one thing nobody disputes: it is a great deal easier to say than the old one.

BirdLife has also moved offices to larger premises at Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.

IWRB appoints Africa Programme Officer

The International Wetlands and Waterfowl Research Bureau has appointed Ben Davies as their new Africa Programme Officer. Among other things he will be responsible for coordinating the African Waterfowl Census, in which Kenya participates annually.

Bird Family Profiles

3: Herons

Leon Bennun
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

The herons (Family Ardeidae) are an ancient group, dating back at least 55 million years to the Lower Eocene. Around 18 of the 60 or so known species are found in Kenya (exactly how many depends on the classification one uses!), meaning that we have close on a third of the world's herons.

Herons typically are slender birds with long necks, long legs and long, sharp beaks. Their wings are long and broad, and they have a slow but powerful flight. The group of 'day-herons', sub-family Ardeinae, includes most of the familiar species of heron and egret with graceful long necks and legs. In these species the sixth cervical vertebra is unusually long, giving a characteristic S-shape to the neck. During flight the long neck is folded back (storks and cranes, other long-necked birds, fly with the neck extended). The night-herons, sub-family Nycticoracinae, and the bitterns, sub-family Botaurini, are generally plumper and chunkier, with a squatter appearance and shorter legs and necks. Whatever the sub-family, in most species the sexes are very similar both in size and appearance.

Goliath Heron — *Simon Thomsett*

Herons have soft plumage patterned in white, grey, blue, black and brown. During the breeding season many species develop long filamentous plumes on the back, head or breast. These form an important part of courtship displays. Unfortunately these plumes were almost the downfall of

many species during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the spectacular ladies' hats in fashion in Europe and America relied on heron plumes for decoration. So great was the slaughter that several conservation groups, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in Britain, were set up specifically to protect herons. Thankfully fashions eventually changed and this is no longer a major threat to heron populations.

Another feature of heron plumage is the presence of 'powder down' patches. These are areas of down feathers that grow continuously and disintegrate at the tip to form a powder. Most species have two or three pairs of patches on the breast and rump. The powder is used in preening, particularly to remove grease from the feathers. A bird collects the down in its beak and passes it to the claw of the middle toe, which is specially serrated for just this purpose. From there it is applied to the feathers.

For a few days during courtship the bare parts of a heron's face, legs and bill can undergo spectacular changes in colour. For example, the Yellow-billed Egret goes bright green around the eyes and acquires a brilliant red bill. At a casual glance, it looks like a totally different species. These changes are usually short-lived, and the bird soon reverts to normal once courtship is over.

Many herons are sociable, often feeding in groups and breeding in large colonies called heronries. The reasons for this colonial breeding are not well understood, but probably include synchronisation of nesting activity and protection from predators. The nests are built in trees above water, often on flooded lagoons. Only a few heronries are known in Kenya, notably on the lower Tana River near Garsen and near Kisumu. Black-headed Herons sometimes breed in or near major towns; a large colony of this species used to exist in the Kenya Railways depot in Nairobi, but sadly was destroyed a few years ago. These heronries are very important sites but surprisingly we have little information on their status in recent years. Some species, notably the smaller ones, are more solitary, as is the largest African species, the Goliath Heron. In Kenya Goliath Herons breed on islands in Lake Turkana and Lake Baringo and avoid the main heronries, although they sometimes do form small colonies of 20 or so birds.

Heron chicks do not all hatch at the same time but over a period of two or more days. The larger chicks often try to monopolise the food their parents bring and even to kill their younger siblings. The amount of aggression between siblings is highest when the parents bring small food items that can easily be monopolised by one chick.

Herons typically are aquatic feeders. They usually hunt in a leisurely way, often standing motionless for long periods staring at the water, poised to strike, sometimes moving the head slightly back and forth or from side to side to help correct for refraction in the water. When prey comes within reach the long neck is

hurled forwards in a lightning stab and the prey grasped firmly in the beak or, less often, impaled. Birds may also wade slowly and stealthily through the water looking for prey; some species with brightly-coloured feet use 'foot-stirring', either to attract their prey or to dislodge it from the bottom. Particularly notable is the Black Heron, which spreads its wings over its head to form an 'umbrella' that shades the water, probably attracting fish and certainly giving the heron a better view. The Green-backed Heron fishes with bait, such as a large insect. This odd behaviour has been reported in many parts of its extensive range but not, so far, in Kenya.

Not all herons are found near water. The Black-headed Heron prefers open grassland, where it hunts rodents and lizards, and is not at all averse to taking the odd bird when circumstances allow. The Cattle Egret is well known for its habit of following livestock and large wild herbivores, feeding on the insects they attract or stir up as they move.

Herons are powerful fliers and can move great distances. One indication of this is the very widely-spaced distribution of heronries. Although nearly all the Kenyan species probably breed within the country, many have populations augmented by Palearctic migrants during part of the year. At least one, the Madagascar Squacco Heron, is only a non-breeding visitor.

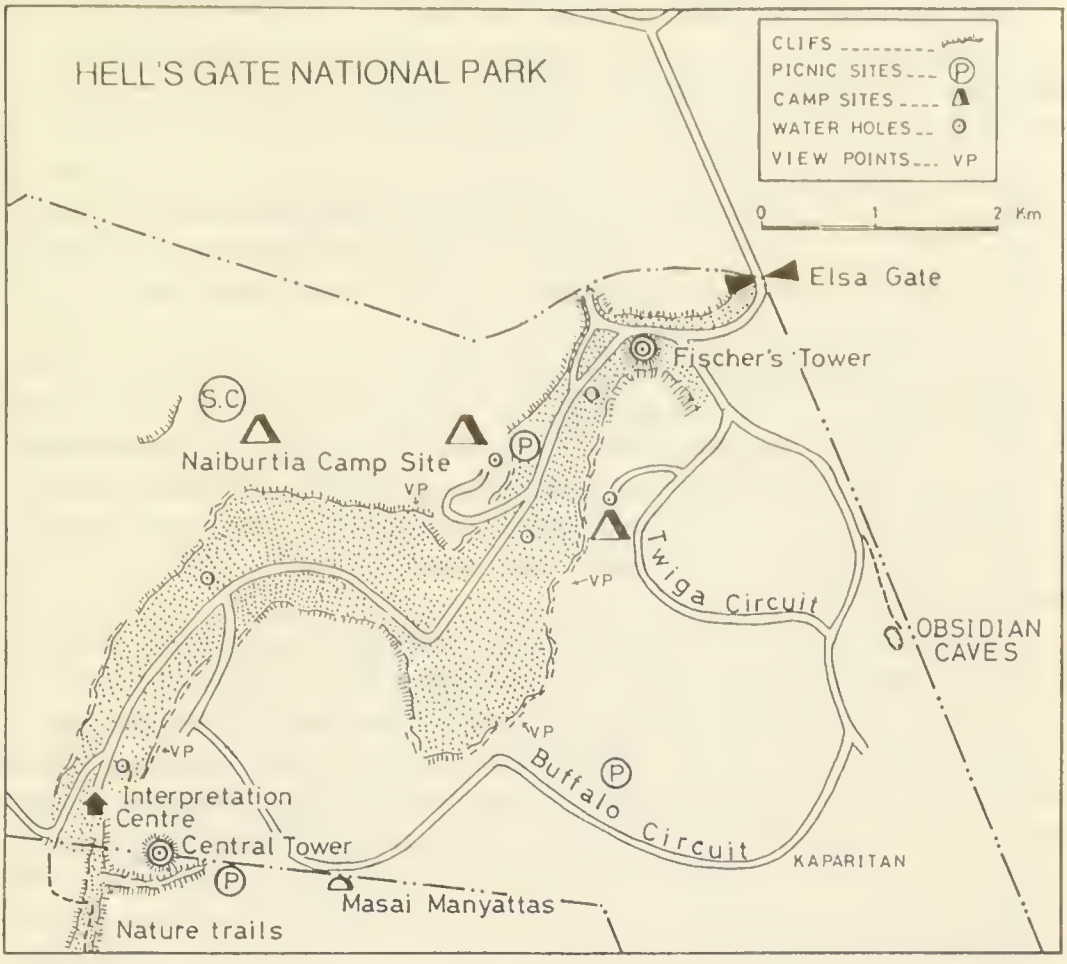
As wetland habitats continue to diminish, herons are increasingly threatened. The fact that most species depend on just a few breeding sites, where very large numbers congregate, also makes them vulnerable. Although lavishly plumed hats are thankfully a thing of the past, herons require our attention and concern if they are to continue to flourish.

Birding in... Hell's Gate National Park

Mervyn Carnelley
P O Box 79, Naivasha

If you are thinking of visiting Hell's Gate National Park, less than two hours from Nairobi, why not make a day of it and take a picnic... and of course binoculars. The entrance to Hell's Gate is 14 km on the left along the newly tarmacked Naivasha South Lake Road.

Between the turn-off and Elsa Gate, look out for sunbirds — Bronze, Scarlet-chested and Golden-winged — especially if the *Leonotis* is in flower. Once through the gate and onto the open grassland you should, during the European Winter, see the Isabelline Wheatear and also the resident Rufous-naped Lark, Kenya Rufous Sparrow and Richard's Pipit. Stop at Fischer's Tower to look at



the many Rock Hyrax which are extremely tame but can bite! Here, almost invariably, is an Augur Buzzard perched on the very top while on the rocks below a pair of Schalow's Wheatears is always in evidence. They are a local wheatear and love rocky outcrops and cliffs. Look out for their buff, rather than white, rump and crown. Cisticola addicts should watch for the Wailing Cisticola at the base of the cliffs opposite (and on steep rocky hillsides elsewhere in the park). The other common species is the Rattling, found in open thorn scrub, though several others have been recorded.

From Fischer's Tower, turn up left towards Twiga and Buffalo Circuits. These climb 300 m with fantastic views, beyond Kaparitan, of Suswa and the Geothermal Power Station at Ol Karia. On the way up you may well see a family of Ostrich as well as many Anteater Chats, black birds showing a white wing patch as they fly away. White-fronted Bee-eaters, which breed in and around the park, are often perched on the whistling thorns.

Having reached the summit, admired the views and dropped down the steep escarpment to the Masai manyattas, look out for Egyptian Vultures and (again) White-fronted Bee-eaters. Your road brings you out at the Second Waterhole where there is almost always a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl with, maybe, an Egyptian Goose or Sacred Ibis. Turn left and soon you should see a flock of Black-lored Babblers in the thick Leleshwa scrub. Straight across on the further cliffs is where, in 1992, the Verreaux's Eagles were nesting. The Special Campsite is very close to their nesting site. This pair of Verreaux's usually start soaring about at around 5 p.m.

A little further down along this stretch you will probably come across Hildebrandt's Francolins running along the road and, at all times, the inevitable Laughing Doves in the dusty track. Look out for the Yellow Bishop, vividly coloured during the breeding season, as well as Purple Grenadiers and, occasionally, a flock of Yellow-rumped Seed-eaters. On the cliffs to your right, above the extensive 'whitewash', there are usually many Rüppell's Griffon Vultures perching and, at times, nesting.

By now you should have reached the Interpretation Centre where you may leave your car in the care of the Game Ranger and, one hopes, have time to explore the Lower Gorge. It's a bit of a scramble down; once there, you come to an old stone dam full of water (and leeches). In the 1950s this used to supply water to the large circular tank near the Interpretation Centre where the Buffalo now drink. Carry on down the twisty, wet trail (wonderful for children: those less agile had best take a stout stick) and look out for butterflies and dragonflies. Four hundred metres on, to the left, is a narrow side gorge where I have seen a pair of Mackinder's Eagle Owls and, frequently, Red-winged Starlings disappearing into cracks high up in the cliffs. You may walk some 300–400 m up this fascinating canyon before coming to a dead end. Here you turn back and carry on down the main gorge, under hot waterfalls, to where you can climb up to the View Point overlooking the whole of the rest of the Lower Gorge. From there you can take a gentle walk back along the road for a kilometre and a half to the car.

By now it is probably afternoon. This is a good time for the game and raptors. Unfortunately many of the cliffs will now be in deep shadow so, if your interest is primarily in the birds of prey, better look for them earlier in the morning when the sun is on the cliffs.

In the thick Leleshwa before the Second Waterhole you might well see a herd of Buffalo with their attendant Red-billed Oxpeckers. Carry straight on past the Second Waterhole, looking out for the Verreaux's Eagles; before long, at the far end of the high cliffs to your right, you will again spot many Rüppell's Vultures perching or nesting above their white droppings. Round a bend to the left and here is a good spot for spectacular African Hoopoes, Blue-eared Glossy Star-

lings, Superb Starlings and, at times, a flock of Wattled Starlings. The whistling thorns form favourite perches for Fiscal Shrikes, which use the thorns for their larders.

Giraffe are fond of this area near the First Waterhole and are usually host to Red-billed Oxpeckers. During their migration period, one can often spot Steppe Eagles or Steppe Buzzards enjoying a drink.

By now you are approaching the high Lammergeier Cliffs to your left. Near the top there are some rock crannies frequented by Lanner Falcons which prey on the hundreds of Nyanza and Mottled Swifts which congregate in the evenings. Alas, for the last eight years, I have not seen the Lammergeier for which this area was so famous but there are hopes that this magnificent species may be reintroduced. Soon you will reach a fork in the road and on the right a 6 m yellow-barked thorn tree. This is a favourite nesting place for the local pair of Secretary Birds; they nest on top, the lower branches being occupied by a colony of Speke's Weavers. Take the left-hand fork along the base of the cliff and further on you will see yet more Rüppell's Griffon Vulture nests high up near the top of the cliffs. Further on, where the road joins another coming in from the right, stop and look up for the nests, over white droppings, of the Egyptian Vultures. They are usually there. The left road leads to the Ranger's Quarters, so bear right and end up at Fischer's Tower, having completed the whole circuit and, one hopes, a successful day of bird and game-watching. Come again.

Acknowledgement. Thanks to Yvonne Malcolm-Coe for additional information on the cisticolas.

Erratum

In the article "Friedmann's Lark resurfaces in Tsavo" (*Kenya Birds* 1(2): 43–44), lines 8–9 should have read "a lark tape-recorded at Kiboko in June 1974 by Roy Gregory and Rowland MacVicker." Mr Gregory's name was inadvertently omitted in the manuscript and the authors wish to apologise to him for this error.

Acknowledgement

Yvonne Malcolm-Coe would like to express her thanks to Adrian Lewis, who gave permission to draw on his accounts of cisticola identification (published in the EANHS Bulletin, 1981–1982) for her article in *Kenya Birds* 1: 48–50.

Birding at... Naivasha

Geoffrey Irvine & Leon Bennun
P O Box 1356, Naivasha & P O Box 40658, Nairobi

Only one-and-a-half hours drive from Nairobi, and on good tarmac the whole way, is one of the finest birding places in Kenya: and that means, in the world!

The Naivasha lakes

These actually comprise three separate bodies of water. The largest is the main lake, which holds good drinkable water supporting fish and crayfish; a huge population of water birds both local and migrant; and vegetation of many kinds, most obviously the fringe of feathery papyrus that can obscure the view from the lake shore. On the open water mats of floating weed, both *Salvinia* and Water Hyacinth, drift to and fro along with floating islands of papyrus. When water levels are high, sheltered weed-covered lagoons form behind the papyrus, providing some of the best birding spots. These can be approached on foot.

Oloidien Bay is the second of the three lakes. It is a bay to the big lake when water levels are high, but currently is separated by a substantial isthmus and contains much more alkaline water. Nevertheless it also supports fish and maintains a considerable number of hippo. The beauty of Oloidien Bay is that the alkalinity prevents the growth of any papyrus, so the green grass of the shores runs right to the water and birding from the land is a delight.

Wetland habitats on these two lakes include open water, floating weed, muddy and rocky shores, and dense papyrus beds. The birds vary from one habitat to another. Secluded weed-covered lagoons provide shelter for two handsome species, the African Jacana and the Long-toed Lapwing, both of which have immensely elongated toes to support them as they walk across the floating vegetation. They are quite at home on the introduced *Salvinia*, but the Water Hyacinth provides a less hospitable surface. The dense stands of papyrus provide a home for the magnificent Goliath Heron. Its smaller counterpart, the Purple Heron, is also quite common at Naivasha and this is a good place to see it. If you are lucky you may glimpse the Purple Gallinule or the African Water Rail, both usually keeping to dense cover at the edge of a lagoon. The little warbler with the loud musical song that flits in and out at the edge of the papyrus, maddeningly hard to see, is probably the Lesser Swamp Warbler. The papyrus also provides a perch for the tiny, jewel-like Malachite Kingfisher, which watches the water intently before plunging in head first to capture a fish.

Especially during the Palearctic winter, muddy shores harbour a wide variety

of waders in great abundance. These include two particularly attractive little plovers, the Three-banded and Kittlitz's. At the right time of year Little Stints, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers and Ringed Plovers throng the shoreline, along with small numbers of Black-tailed Godwit. Common Sandpipers abound in the rockier areas, where other birds are scarcer.

Wintering Palaearctic duck are often abundant, although their numbers vary from year to year. Pintail, Garganey, Shoveler and the occasional Wigeon can be seen both on the open water and feeding in quiet lagoons. Two diving ducks, the White-backed Duck and Maccoa Duck, used to be common at Naivasha, but have both largely disappeared from the main lake, perhaps as a result of gill-net fishing. Maccoas can still be seen on Oloidien, however, and this is also one of the few places in Kenya where one is now likely to sight the Great Crested Grebe (see "Threatened Birds of Kenya" in this issue).

Pied Kingfisher — *John Banks*

Sonachi Crater Lake is by far the smallest of the three lakes, and a very different place from the other two. Magically hidden inside a true crater to the south-west of the big lake, it is highly alkaline and has no fish or hippo; the water is coloured a beautiful bright green by algae that from time to time attract Lesser Flamingo. There are always Little Grebe here; White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns dip and flutter over the placid surface; and Cape Teal, which prefer alkaline waters, are resident. The lake is ringed with a margin of spiny sedges and grasses, then dense bush followed by a fine stand of *Acacia* forest. Ibises, Osprey, the occasional darter and others roost here at night.

Acacia forest and bush

All three lakes have fine stands of *Acacia xanthophloea* forest and bush on their verges, which teem with interesting birds. Here you need to take your time. Sit, look and listen; wait for the birds to come to you rather than crashing about looking for them. A folding camp stool forms the ideal bird-watching perch.

The Tropical Boubou's bell-like call rings through the forest. The bird hopping about the leaf mould on the forest floor is almost certainly the White-browed Robin Chat, an accomplished vocalist and mimic, while from dense creepers comes the Grey-capped Warbler's loud and musical duet. Hole-nesting

birds are numerous in the forest, including Grey and Bearded Woodpeckers and their parasites, the Greater and Scaly-throated Honeyguides. Flocks of Green Wood-hoopoes move through the trees in a chattering chorus. Loud startling flocks of hybrid lovebirds sweep through the upper branches: these are beautiful but an introduced pest. Near the forest edge sit groups of Grey-backed Fiscals, swinging their tails, and from dense cover comes the bubbling, rising-and-falling duet of Hunter's Cisticola. In the more open patches of grassland between the trees pairs or trios of dignified Ground Hornbills pace about; the male's booming call is echoed by his mate at a slightly higher pitch. White-fronted Bee-eaters breed at Naivasha in sandy cliffs and excavations, and these delightful birds are often seen perched on fence or telephone wires.

Bird activity and birdwatching

The birds on and around the lake change with the season, the weather and the time of day. During the northern winter, migrant duck and waders flock the shores and waters. They are seen to best effect just before departure and just after arrival, when in partial breeding plumage. Resident birds, particularly the terrestrial ones, breed mainly during the long and short rainy seasons (March to June and October to December), when activity is at its height and plumages their most arresting. If the rains are poor and the lake falling, stretches of mud are exposed which provide rich feeding grounds for the waders. A rising lake, on the other hand, makes life difficult for all but the largest, such as Greenshank and Black-tailed Godwit. During the cold weather of July to September there is less bird activity on the lake, and this is perhaps a good time to turn one's attention to the bush and forest.

The best time for birdwatching, without a doubt, is the morning hours. Activity is greatest from sun-up to 11:00 and fortunately this also coincides with the best of the weather. Early morning is often cloudless with brilliantly clear air and lots of activity. As the sun warms up, a welcome breeze appears; but beware: the gentle breeze of mid-morning can blow up into dangerous squalls on the open lake by afternoon. It is often a good idea to get out onto the water in the early part of the day and then move to the land as the wind gets up.

Access to places of interest in Naivasha

All the watersides of Naivasha are privately owned, and understandably cannot allow unrestricted access. Fortunately however, there are several places that cater specifically for the visitor and for the birder in particular. Below are mentioned a few of these with telephone number and post box number. Standard and level vary considerably so preliminary enquiries are strongly recommended.

The Naivasha Country Club P O Box 40075 Nairobi, tel. Nairobi 540780. Like all the Block Hotels this place has superb facilities, lovely grounds and the special privilege of access to Crescent Island by boat. Birders can land on the island and spend as long as they wish, planning with the boatman the time for collection. Smaller boats with competent boatmen can be hired.

Safariland P O Box 72 Naivasha, tel. Naivasha 20241. Shares with the Country Club the privilege of access to Crescent Island, and has extensive forested grounds and gardens. Smaller boats with boatmen available for hire.

Fisherman's Camp P O Box 76 Naivasha. Tel Naivasha 30276. This place has much to offer both the visitor and the camper. Beautiful bird-filled wooded grounds and waters' edge; boats for hire with competent boatmen; and access to other neighbouring areas.

Elsamere P O Box 1497 Naivasha, tel. Naivasha 30079. This is a place with a difference and very well worth visiting after 3 p.m. when special arrangements are made for day visitors, with an excellent tea and access to the bush and forest around. A boat is available. This is the place for the serious student and bird watcher (see "Elsamere" article in this issue).

Mr and Mrs Burch (P O Box 40 Naivasha, tel. Naivasha 20154) offer conducted boat trips with very competent boatman. Pre-booking is essential for they are very busy especially on holidays.

Cordon Bleu Safaris (P O Box 7056 Nairobi, tel. 882634 Nairobi) run a tented safari camp situated right in the Sonachi Crater, on the waters' edge where birding facilities are excellent and conducted trips available. Alternatively, day visitors can drive up to the entrance and, for a fee, have access to the area; competent guides are available.

Several other houses and private homes also take visitors: their names and addresses are available from Let's Go Travel, P O Box 60342, tel. 229539, 229540, 223294, Nairobi.

Naivasha, with magnificent scenery and enormously varied and spectacular birdlife, deserves more than a casual visit. Good Birding!

Records and Notes

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records to ***Kenya Birds****, please consider the following guidelines. For* ***breeding records****, send in cases of CONFIRMED breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/ fledglings. Records of confirmed breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of nest-building, courtship etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. You are strongly urged to fill in a* ***nest-record card*** *at the same time.*

Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every second year in the Annual Bird Report of Scopus.

For other records of ***Afrotropical/oceanic*** *birds and* ***Palaearctic*** *birds, please send in any sightings and notes that you think are of interest. The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For* ***all*** *records, including breeding records, please be as precise as possible about* ***dates*** *and* ***locations****. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these records when we begin, very soon, to update and refine the present Bird Atlas of Kenya by computerising bird distribution records.*

Supporting details are always welcomed for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication. Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the Scopus *Annual Bird Report (the third issue of* Scopus *each year). These should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi), who can also supply information on which records are required. For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the OS-c Rarities Committee.*

Key to records

New atlas square records are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres**, present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf**, confirmed breeding; **post conf**, confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. **[pres, conf 25B]** indicates that the species is present and confirmed as breeding in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated here (and elsewhere in *Kenya Birds*) the English names follow Britton (ed.) 1980 *Birds of East Africa*.

Breeding records

Little Grebe [conf 63A]: Adult sitting, mate in attendance, E. Mt Kenya 22/1/92 GI & DI. **Secretary Bird**: One sitting, Masai Mara GR 10/4/93 AJB. **Lizard Buzzard [prob 101C]**: Pair building nest, Salt Lick 3/2/93 AJB. **Tawny Eagle**: Downy chick being fed, Aitong, Mara 10/8/92 PD. **Grey Crowned Cranes** *Balearica regulorum*: Adults with two half-grown young, Masai Mara GR 10/4/93 AJB. **Black-winged Plover [post conf 62C]**: Four eggs 19/5/91, three eggs 3/5/92 North Kinangop area, JW. **African Hoopoe [conf 87D]**: Pair feeding young in a tree hole, Namanga 13/8/88 NR & DR. **Von der Decken's Hornbill [conf 101C]**: Pair feeding fledglings, Salt Lick Sanctuary 4/2/93 AJB. **African Penduline Tit [conf 49B]**: Adults taking insects to nest, red cliffs, Baringo 12/7/92 NW & VGW. **Grey Cuckoo Shrike [post conf 75B]**: Pair building 25/11, feeding chick 13/1/88 FN. **Banded Parisoma [post conf 88A]**: Adults feeding two young, Sultan Hamud 26/11/92 WO. **Beautiful Sunbird**: Pair feeding young, Baringo 7/8/92; male chasing off Northern Masked Weaver that tried to steal nest material PD. **Variable Sunbird [conf 61C]**: Feeding young, Arroket Estate, Sotik, 15/8/92 IWF. **Reichenow's Weaver, Olive Thrush, Red-billed Firefinch, Collared Sunbird**: All with young during unseasonal rains in Nairobi, 2–3/93 FN.

Other records: Afrotropical species

Great Crested Grebe: One, Kimani Mbae Dam, North Kinangop 9/4/93 JW. **Open-billed Stork**: One, Nairobi NP 23/4/93 YMC. **Saddle-billed Stork [pres 61A]**: One, Karenga Dam, Kericho 3/12/92 AJB. **Black Crake [pres 73B]**: One, Lolgorien 13/11/92 AL. **Denham's Bustard**: Two near Aitong 4/11/92 AL. **Black-headed Plover [pres 62A]**: Two pairs, Majani Mingi 20/9/92 IM. **African Cuckoo**: One, Masai Mara GR 10/4/93 AJB. **Levaillant's Cuckoo**: One, Elsamere, Naivasha 14/3/93 AB & BB. **Great Spotted Cuckoo**: Feeding on large black caterpillars in *Ficus* trees in Naivasha town during 12/92 JW. **Bare-faced Go-away Bird [pres 62C]**: One, Hell's Gate 4/93, GI & DI. **Giant Kingfisher**: Pair, Nairobi River by National Museums 6/1/93 WMBw. **Black-billed Barbet [pres 73B]**: Single bird feeding in fig tree, Kilae, Lolgorien 16/10/92 AL. **Cliff Chat [pres 73B]**: Ol Kurruk, Lolgorien 10-11/92 AL. **Grey-backed Fiscal [pres 61C]**: Resident since 7/92, Arroket Estate, Sotik IWF. **Northern Red Bishops**: Many males in full breeding plumage, Baringo 2/93 HG. **Thick-billed Seed-eater [pres 73B]**: Three at Lolgorien River, Lolgorien 12/11/92 AL.

Other records: Palaearctic species

Black Stork [pres 61A] : One on trout dam west of Kericho, 4/4/93 AD. **Steppe Buzzard**: Nairobi 12/5/93 FN. **European Hobby**: Westlands, Nairobi, 25/2, 1/3 and 26/3/93, perching and feeding in dead tree JH. **Eleanora's Falcon**: One found dead, Naivasha, 19/12/93 GI & DI. **Eurasian Cuckoo**: Female picked up in car-park of International Casino, Nairobi, on 14/4/93, apparently stunned; later released JH. **Eurasian Bee-eater**: Shimba Hills 14/4/93; Nairobi 12/5/93 FN. **Eurasian Swallow**: Thousands in Hell's Gate NP in the evening, 27–28/2/93 FN. **House Martin**: Near cliffs, Moi North Lake Rd., Naivasha, 27–28/2/93 FN. **Golden Oriole [pres 73B]**: One male, three females, Lolgorien 13/11/92 AL. **Sedge Warbler**: Nairobi 12/5/93 FN. **Blackcap** and **Willow Warbler**: Singing, Nairobi 1–15/3/93 FN.

Contributors

AB & BB, Tony and Brenda Bates; AD, Antoinette Dufresne; AJB, 'Kimbo' Beakbane; AL, Annemarie Lohding; FN, Fleur Ng'weno; GI & DI, Geoffrey and Dorothy Irvine; HG, Hilary Garland; IM, Ian Marshall; IWF, Ian Francombe; JH, Jean Hartley; JW, James Wainaina; NR & DR, Nehemiah & Damaris Rotich; NW & VGW, N. & V.G. Wilson; PD, Peter Davey; WMBw, Wednesday morning birdwalk group; WO, Willis Okech.

New atlas records for square 64A

During a study of Red-billed Quelea in Tharaka Division, Meru, from 8–18 December 1992 and 3–18 January 1993 I observed a number of species hitherto unrecorded in atlas square 64A. These are: Little Sparrowhawk; Lizard Buzzard; Shikra; Augur Buzzard; Tawny Eagle; Green Sandpiper; Brown Parrot; Red-chested Cuckoo; Emerald Cuckoo; Klaas' Cuckoo; Didric Cuckoo; White-

browed Coucal; Red and Yellow Barbet; Lesser Honeyguide; Red-rumped Swallow; African Penduline Tit; Yellow-bellied Greenbul; Reed Warbler; Great Reed Warbler; Stout Cisticola; Southern Black Flycatcher, Pale Flycatcher; Black-headed Tchagra; Tropical Boubou; Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike; Helmet Shrike; Retz's Helmet Shrike; Black-breasted Glossy Starling; Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Golden Palm Weaver; Red-headed Weaver; White-winged Widowbird; Yellow-spotted Petronia; Green-winged Pytilia; Paradise Whydah; Jameson's Firefinch Indigobird; African Firefinch; Purple Grenadier; Straw-tailed Whydah; Crimson-rumped Waxbill; Bronze Mannikin; and Yellow-rumped Seed-eater. — *Bosse Soderstrom, Regnstigen 5, 171 46 Solna, Sweden.*

Bronze-naped Pigeon feasting on algae

On the evenings of 30 December 1992 and 4–6 January 1993 I watched a male Bronze-naped Pigeon eating algae from the Chagaik Dam in the Kericho Arboretum. The bird would fly to the branch of a tree overhanging the dam some 3 m above the water. From there it flew down onto the open water, where it sat looking for all the world like a peculiar sea gull. While resting on the water, the pigeon then proceeded to consume great beakfuls of green water-weed, plucking it from just below the surface. After 1–5 minutes on the water it would return to the overhanging branch, sometimes flying up with a mouthful of weed that it would lay strand by strand along the branch, consuming each strand individually before returning to the water again. On each evening the bird was watched for 30–65 minutes during which he made between three and eight sorties down to the water, ignoring the water birds (Moorhens, Black Crakes, Little Grebes, Yellow-billed and African Black Ducks) that moved around him. I have recorded a pair of Bronze-naped Pigeons in this area over the last two years but have never seen this peculiar behaviour before. — *A.J. ('Kimbo') Beakbane, Box 42011 Nairobi.*

[*Editors' note:* 'Algivory' has also been recorded in Kenya in Black-and-white Mannikins and Oriole Finches: have readers seen this phenomenon in any other species?]

Olive Pigeons congregate above Naivasha

The road to North Kinangop from Naivasha at first rises slowly then climbs sharply up the last step in the escarpment, to the level plateau of Nyandarua District. Parts of this steep scarp (at about 2400 m) are still clothed in indigenous forest or scrub, with a wide variety of plants and birds. I watch birds here regularly but saw Olive Pigeons for the first time on 26 December 1992, when about fifty birds were present. Numbers slowly increased and by the end of

January they were very numerous, perhaps two thousand or more. The birds are feeding on the fruits of the Brown Olive, *Olea europea* var *africana*. The trees had started fruiting at the beginning of December 1992. During January and February rainfall was heavy, and by the end of February the trees were covered with the small oval fruit, dark-red at first but becoming purplish when ripe.

The birds' droppings give a clear indication of their food. They are purplish in colour with undigested seeds clearly visible. The droppings have dyed the tree-trunks and the shrubs and undergrowth nearby with a vivid purple hue.

The birds roost in the trees but generally fly off early each morning towards the highlands in the North. They return to the trees in the afternoon and commence feeding. Many birds are also seen displaying. Aerial displays involve a bird flapping to gain height, then soaring slowly round while calling hoarsely "craa, craa, craa". It then swoops in on a resting group, causing a great commotion, with birds puffing up their necks like a Speckled Pigeon while making a deep hoarse cooing. Sometimes they strike each other with their wings and make short chases. Despite all the displays, I have seen no sign of nesting taking place.

While they feed and rest in the olive trees during the afternoon, the pigeon flocks are very vulnerable to predation by an unidentified falcon, probably either a Lanner or a Peregrine. It flies low and fast over the treetops then swoops down rapidly on a pigeon, causing the rest of the flock to scatter and fly high into the sky before regrouping a few minutes later. The cooing and displaying then continues as before.

At the time of writing, in May 1993, the trees are still fruiting vigorously and the birds are as numerous as ever. Presumably they will disappear again once the olives eventually stop producing fruit. — *James Wainaina Gathitu, P O Box 695, Naivasha.*

Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo in Nairobi National Park

A Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* was seen in Nairobi National Park by Mike Clifton and myself on 20 and 22 April 1993.

The bird was first observed on 20 April at 17:00 h about 200 m west of Point No. 3, on the south bank of a dry river bed close to the road. Excellent views were obtained as the bird spent a long time perched before flying to the ground to catch prey. It would then fly to an adjacent tree and sit again for five minutes or longer before returning to the ground. During our 30 minute observation, we lost sight of it at one stage and, on moving the vehicle, found it sitting on the ground. It stayed there for about three minutes.

We returned to the same site on 22 April at 16:30 h and saw the bird again, this

time about 100 m further west. The vegetation here was considerably thicker and we lost it from view after about 10 minutes of observation. We stayed in the same area for a further 20 minutes and then drove along the north bank of the river in the hope of finding it again, but without success.

On both occasions the bird was in thick riverine vegetation. It appeared to prefer to perch in the shade. It was normally about 2 m off the ground and never went higher into the trees.

We both use small tape recorders for our field observations and the following description was made while the bird was in view.

"A medium-sized cuckoo (considerably smaller than the Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*, which I had in the hand the previous week) about the size of a Red-chested Cuckoo, *Cuculus solitarius*. Back dark grey, almost gun-metal grey. Tail medium length, very dark, almost black with a faint dirty white band at the tip. Head slightly lighter than the back, no crest. Throat the same grey as the head. Chest and belly white, finely barred with black. Bill black, eye reddish-brown. Very slightly mottled appearance to the back, primaries darker than wing. Underside of tail not seen".

It would appear that this was a first-year bird because of the fine banding on the chest and the reddish brown eye with no yellow surrounding skin. There was no rufous colouring to the bird. — *Dennie Angwin, P O Box 14166, Nairobi.*

[*Editors' note*: the Asian Lesser Cuckoo *C. poliocephalus* and Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *C. rochii* are two very similar birds that are now generally recognised as separate species. The Asian Lesser Cuckoo passes through coastal Kenya on its way north in March–April; there are few records at other times. The Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo is also a non-breeding migrant, present mainly April to September. The two are indistinguishable except by voice; however, the fact that this record is of a first-year bird suggests that it is a Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo just arrived, rather than an Asian Lesser Cuckoo departing. The record has been submitted to the EANHS OS-c Rarities Panel for confirmation.]

Cuckoo calls

I was interested to see Jean Hartley's Emerald Cuckoo observations in *Kenya Birds* (1(2), 42–43). Yes, indeed, this breeding call of the Emerald Cuckoo is heard rarely. During a Wednesday morning birdwalk in Karura Forest some four years ago, two of us heard such a call and I agreed to do some homework on it. Going to Mackworth-Praed and Grant (Handbook of African Birds Series I, vol.1) I found the description mentioned by Jean: "There is another call, a more melodious series of notes according to Dr Chapin, but it is rarely heard." Fleur

Ng'weno tells me that she also hear such a call, again in Karura Forest, some seven or eight years ago, and saw two Emerald Cuckoos.

While staying at Bushwhackers on the Tsavo River during the short rains of 1979, I recorded a group of three African Cuckoos. It was raining heavily at the time and I stood under a tree and had great amusement in recording their chorus of irregular and excited "Coo-cucks".

During the very wet period of the late 1980s, I visited Olorgesailie quite often, and in May 1988 I recorded a group of five Black-and-white Cuckoos. Imagine the chorus of "loud metallic laughing cackles", "Qeur-qui-quik, quer-qui-quik".

Again at Olorgesailie during a short visit in 1991, I saw three Red-chested Cuckoos: two adults and one immature. The two adults were calling excitedly on one side of a river-bed, while the immature was perched in a tree on the other. The adults called constantly and made several flying sorties until, finally, the young bird flew over to them, whereupon all three cuckoos flew off together. — *Yvonne Malcolm-Coe, Box 48504, Nairobi.*

Lammergeyer in Amboseli National Park

On 16 March 1993 an adult Lammergeyer *Gypaetus barbatus* was seen circling over the Ol Tukai Bandas, Amboseli National Park. When first seen at 13:50 h, the bird was only about 25 m above the ground, so low that the wind could be heard whistling through its feathers as it flapped to gain height. It was in view for 15 minutes, slowly gaining height as it flew south towards Mt Kilimanjaro. As it was so close, the red skin around the eye was easily visible, as was the white head with conspicuous black 'beard' and rich creamy underparts. With this colouring, its huge size, and long diamond-shaped tail, there was no doubt about the identification.

Because the bird was so low I strongly suspect that it had taken off from the ground nearby, very possibly from the rubbish tip at Amboseli Lodge. (The first Amboseli record was from a rubbish tip.) If this was the case, I speculate that more observations will be made of this magnificent bird in Amboseli. It is interesting to note that during the first half of 1992 when the Partridge Films crew were camped on the Shira Plateau of Kilimanjaro, they saw and filmed both adult and young Lammergeyers fairly regularly. I wonder why my observation from Amboseli is, to the best of my knowledge, only the second record from that area. It would seem likely that they are more frequently over the Park but are not recorded. So birders, get the 'binos' on any soaring vulture as it may be another Lammergeyer. — *Dennie Angwin, P O Box 14166, Nairobi.*

Bringing back the Lammergeyer of Hell's Gate

In virtually any book or travel guide, Hell's Gate is credited with the magnificent Lammergeyer or Bearded Vulture. This huge bird of prey does not grace the cliffs today because of disturbance of its ancestral nest site.

Dr Leslie Brown stated that this species was "much disturbed" by rock climbers and failed to breed during 1972 to 1975. Its last known nesting attempt was in 1979, but rock climbers continued to climb right by and even into their nest site. In 1984 a cinema film unit disturbed the main wall by frequent fly-pasts in aircraft and helicopters. In this year the birds finally vanished, ironically at the same time that the area became a National Park. Any chance of the Lammergeyers' return was ruined by continued rock climbing and more cinema film units who dynamited the cliff wall and parachuted from the nest site. This total lack of concern for Kenya's most famous pair of birds is hard to understand.

Lammergeyer — *Simon Thomsett*

Today the KWS staff at Hell's Gate are fully committed to bringing these birds back. Park Wardens Joseph Ruhiu and Richard Obanda and ranger Francis N'dage have designed constructive management procedures aimed at re-introducing the Lammergeyer to the park. The first and most obvious action has been to ban all rock climbing on the main wall. The nest site, which is uniquely small and cramped, will be enlarged: this will be tough work, involving a metre hole knocked straight into solid rock some 250 feet off the ground!

Next we need some young Lammergeyer chicks. Fortunately one of the tranger features of large raptor breeding biology gives us a 'spare' chick. Lammergeyers normally lay two eggs, but only rear one chick. As in many aptors the elder chick may immediately attack and kill its younger brother in a Cain and Abel' battle, or the younger, weaker chick may simply starve to death. ust what happens with the Lammergeyers is still disputed, but the fact remains nat one chick can be removed (or, rather, rescued) and then reared in captivity, vithout any harm to the wild birds. The rest is simplicity itself. The chicks are aised taking care not to imprint them on people and then placed in an artificial est site near to their intended future nest site. Here they are fed whilst becoming ccustomed to the area, then released shortly after their feathers are fully grown. They will hang about the area and return to be fed. This is an ancient procedure alled 'hacking'.

The only problem is that Lammergeyers are hard to come by. The last known reeding site in East Africa is the ill-fated one at Hell's Gate. By contrast they are ocally common in Ethiopia and Lesotho in Southern Africa. Obtaining birds rom either of these sources would be quite legitimate as they are the same race s ours; in such a mobile species genetic differences are likely to be minimal. Unfortunately the logistics of acquiring permits and permission, and outfitting xpeditions into remote and sometimes hostile regions, will probably combine to nake success impossible. So we have to find those few other nests in Kenya, vhich are probably situated on the moorland cliffs of our mountains. If anyone appens to know of a Lammergeyer nest please let us know! — *Simon Thomsett, O Box 42818, Nairobi.*

African Spoonbill devoured by African Python

Continuing the theme of murder and mayhem in the first issue ("Lesser Flamingo alls prey to Fish Eagle, Murderous Ground Hornbills..."), we report that vaterfowl watchers can bring out the worst in snakes too.

Just inland from Arabuko-Sokoke Forest lies beautiful, seasonal, Lake Jilore. t the height of the rains, it is a long ribbon of shallow water which stretches just outh of the main Malindi-Tsavo road near a steep valley which descends beyond ilore Forest Station. It attracts a wide range of waterbirds, as well as elephants, shermen, and farmers bringing their cattle, goats and sheep to drink. During the ay, the lake is a hive of activity, with birds and people carrying on their lives ntirely unhindered by one another. We have watched farmers planting seasonal rops a few yards from storks hunting in the shallows. Large flocks of Carmine nd Madagascar Bee-eaters hawk around fishermen poling their canoes over the ake. Herons, egrets, crakes and grebes abound.

On 27 July 1992, we climbed down to the lake from the ridge behind Sokoke. It is not the easiest route, but it is the quickest, and we were in a hurry to catch the last of the afternoon light. Setting up our telescope, we scanned the lake edge for any action, enjoying good views of an Allen's Gallinule before alighting on a group of spoonbills which were intently watching a small bay in the reeds. All five were craning forwards in a rather awkward manner and looked rather like nervous gazelles watching a lion kill (so-called 'fascination behaviour').

We pushed our way through the dense shrubs above the lake and reset the scope on the bay. Only three metres from the appalled spoonbills was a large python wrapped tightly around a bird that must have been one of their party. One pathetic wing had escaped the coils, but the bird's struggles were already weak, and in a few minutes the python adjusted its position and slid under the water and into the reeds with its prey. When it moved the other spoonbills leapt hurriedly backwards and soon scattered to sieving the water with their spoon bills. We set off to watch for night-herons leaving their roosts, and Carmine Bee-eaters burned more carmine than ever by the sun setting over the Sabaki river. — *John Fanshawe, P O Box 40658 Nairobi and David Ngala, P O Box 201 Malindi.*

Lolgorien birds mobbing a snake

At the KARI compound in Lolgorien, Trans-Mara, on 20 and 21 October 1992, I observed a mixed party of birds mobbing what I assumed to be a snake on the ground. The mobbing, which went on for at least half an hour on each occasion, was started by excited calls from a Common Bulbul (on the first day) and three Black Flycatchers (on the second day). In addition the following birds, most of them present on both days, were involved: a Red-faced Crombec; two Yellow-breasted Apalis; a Tawny-flanked Prinia; Grey-backed Camaropteras; three White-browed and two Red-capped Robin Chats; two Grey-winged Ground Robins (uncharacteristically emerging from cover); a pair of Chin-spot Batis; a Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike; a Tropical Boubou; a male Black Cuckoo Shrike; White-bellied Tits; Yellow White-eyes; a female Green-headed Sunbird; a pair of Baglafecht Weavers; and an unidentified small woodpecker. Both times the Common Bulbuls made most of the noise, and the two species of robin chats started fighting among themselves. The suspected snake only appeared to move a few metres while the mobbing went on, and about 20 m between the two incidents. Later on I heard reports that there was a "large snake around", but (perhaps fortunately) an inspection of the scrubby area where the birds had been mobbing revealed nothing. — *Annemarie Lohding, Eichelbergstr. 25, W-74429 Sulzbach-1, Germany.*

The raptors of Naivasha and Hell's Gate

Simon Thomsett
P O Box 42818, Nairobi

Any visitor to the Naivasha lake shore will see (and hear!) the African Fish Eagle. To everyone's surprise the Fish Eagle populations have remained remarkably constant over the last 30 years despite remarkable habitat change and continued use of persistent pesticides. Unfortunately, recent reports of dead and dying Fish Eagles strongly suggest poisoning. This adaptable species can be seen nesting in trees all around the lake, totally oblivious of the goings-on below.

The Osprey is a shy winter visitor. It is easily distinguished from other raptors by its pale colour and bent wings which remind one of a Black Kite. The Osprey hunts fish in a different way to the Fish Eagle, diving at a sharp angle straight into the water with a loud splash. Unfortunately this startling sight is not missed by the Fish Eagle which often chases the successful Osprey in an attempt to pirate the prey.

Two lake-shore owls inhabit old-growth *Euphorbia* and Yellow Fever trees. The Pearl-spotted Owlet and the Verreaux's Eagle Owl represent two size extremes: one tiny and partly diurnal, the other massive and nocturnal. Verreaux's Eagle Owl is often heard grunting at night and can be seen towards the evening being mobbed by Fork-tailed Drongos. They feed largely on the numerous mole rats in the area. The Pearl-spotted Owlet particularly favours the large old stands of *Euphorbia*, where holes are easily excavated by barbets and woodpeckers. Unfortunately these *Euphorbia* trees have been severely and senselessly persecuted, undoubtedly leading to the decline of hole-nesting birds.

A pair of Crowned Eagles have built a new nest by the Crater Lake. Luckily this unique area is now being managed as a wildlife sanctuary, so the long term future of this pair seems secure.

The conspicuous Augur Buzzard is still common on the lake shore, feeding, like the Verreaux's Eagle Owl, on mole rats. In contrast their numbers have drastically declined along the main road from Nairobi to Naivasha town. During the early 1970s one might have counted over 30 individuals, but today would be fortunate to find one. Disturbingly, dead raptors, particularly Augur Buzzards, have frequently been found hanging out of trees or lying on the ground around the lake shore and in Hell's Gate. These birds were evidently poisoned, but it is not known by what substance, or how it enters the food chain. These direct deaths bode ill for raptor reproduction... but we are very ignorant about the levels of dangerous pollutants in these top-level predators, and in other birds around the

lake. Nowadays large pesticide-using horticultural schemes exist right on the lake shore, and study is urgently needed.

Hell's Gate has always been an excellent place to see cliff-dwelling raptors. Three pairs of Augur Buzzards, two pairs of Egyptian Vultures, two pairs of Lanner Falcons and two pairs of Verreaux's Eagles breed on the precipitous cliffs, maintaining a relatively stable population. Two vultures, however, have declined very significantly, despite a dramatic increase in ungulate numbers since the area became a National Park. The Rüppell's Griffon Vultures, formerly described as very common and numbering up to thousands in the gorge, are today a shadow of their former selves. Only an estimated 30 individuals still remain in Hell's Gate and only three to six nests are ever occupied.

Such rapid declines would go unnoticed if it was not for past records. The cause is probably a combination of poisoning, direct persecution and disturbance. These vultures were used for target practice during the Second World War, and their favourite nesting ledges became the playground for irresponsible rock climbers from the early 1970s. The small remnant population desperately needs concrete conservation management if it is to survive and recover.

The Lammergeyer or Bearded Vulture is now extinct in the park. The cause of their disappearance was human disturbance. However the local community and KWS staff are initiating a re-introduction project, and it is hoped that these magnificent birds will once again soar over the cliffs (see "Bringing back the Lammergeyers of Hell's Gate" in this issue).

Perhaps one of the most spectacular sights in the park is provided by the Lanner Falcons hunting Nyanza Swifts. The Lanners, which occupy the main wall, sally out together and co-operatively hunt one of the fastest birds in the world. Hunting forays occur at irregular intervals throughout the day but reach a peak at sunset when the swifts gather prior to roosting. The falcons leave the cliff and circle through flocks of many thousand of swifts before taking it into their heads to chase one. The pursuit is breathtaking and the falcons and swifts evenly matched. Here two of the world's fastest animals battle it out daily, while most visitors are meanwhile looking at a Kongoni!

African Fish Eagle — *Simon Thomsett*

Verreaux's Eagles are almost always seen as a pair: sitting side-by-side or flying in close formation. Few couples are as devoted to each other as these huge eagles. They specialise in catching Rock Hyrax, abundant in the park, but are capable of taking small antelope and large game birds and may increasingly find a food source in the emerging population of dik-dik. These eagles snatch hyrax so fast and over such a wide area that it is unlikely that even a week's observation will reward the observer with a successful hunt.

The Augur Buzzards are amusing to watch. Unlike their almost- extinct telegraph-pole cousins outside the park, they survey their small and intensely guarded territories from lofty cliff tops. From here they rush out to challenge their neighbours, calling loudly and dropping their legs in a threatening manner. From the top of the cliff they can also survey the numerous mole rat piles in the grass below. When these move they stoop straight to the spot, briefly hover then drop down clutching at the earth and with luck catching the unhappy rat beneath. On one occasion a Black-tipped Mongoose frightened a mole rat out of the boulders beneath the main wall. An Augur Buzzard dropped vertically from above and took it. The mongoose then attacked the buzzard which spun round and defended his prey from the intruder. All this excitement and still folks were looking at a Kongoni!

Identification first aid: Swifts

Don Turner
P O Box 48019, Nairobi

Swifts superficially resemble swallows, but they are distinctive in their fast and direct flight interspersed with stiff-winged flapping and frequent gliding. They rank among the world's most specialised bird families, with long, slender scythe-like wings and short square-tipped or forked tails. They are the most aerial of all birds, spending long periods high in the sky catching insects — their sole food.

Identification of several of the fifteen species occurring in Kenya is often difficult, particularly so for the all-black and all-brown swifts often seen in the Rift Valley. Below are a few points, fieldmarks and guidelines to look for which will help in putting a name to them other than just "a swift".

To begin with it helps to break the species into several small groups:

1. Mottled, Nyanza and Pallid Swifts

These are three confusing 'all-brown' swifts. The Mottled and Nyanza frequently occur together, while the Pallid Swift is a rare and little-known visitor from North Africa. The central Rift Valley is an ideal place to observe the Mottled and Nyanza Swifts: both breed in large numbers on the cliffs in Hell's Gate.

The **Mottled Swift** (*Apus aequatorialis*) is a very large species (23 cm) with a noticeably long forked tail. It is an extremely fast flier, often following rainstorms, and huge numbers gather in Hell's Gate gorge from 16:30 h each evening.

At close range its mottled underparts are visible together with a pale, rather ill-defined throat patch. It flies with deep powerful wingbeats and fast glides. Small groups often indulge in formation flying uttering high-pitched screaming calls as they pass low overhead.

The **Nyanza Swift** (*A. niansae*) is smaller (15 cm) than the Mottled, also all sooty brown and with a pale white throat. In good light a contrast between the body and paler secondaries is clearly visible, especially from above. This species can often be seen high over the Rift Valley lakes from Naivasha to Nakuru in the mornings and evenings. As a rule they are not as fast-flying as the Mottled, but like that species they too gather in huge numbers each evening around the cliffs in Hell's Gate National Park.

The **Pallid Swift** (*A. pallidus*) is similar in size to the Nyanza Swift, but generally has a much more prominent white throat. It is to be looked for in northern Kenya south to Isiolo, the Nyambenis and Mt Kenya, often associating with other swifts.

2. Eurasian, African Black and Forbes-Watson's Swifts

These are three difficult birds to identify positively. The Eurasian Swift (*A. apus*) is fairly large (16.5 cm), mainly uniform sooty black in the nominate race BUT all sooty brown in the far eastern race *pekinensis*. Both races have a noticeable whitish throat, which is slightly more conspicuous in *pekinensis*. In Kenya this is mainly a passage migrant (often in large flocks) from September–December and late March–April. While nominate birds occur over much of interior Kenya, *pekinensis* is present in large numbers in several coastal areas from the Tana delta south to Kilifi District.

The **African Black Swift** (*A. barbatus*) is similar in size (17.5 cm). In good light it can be separated from the Eurasian migrant (particularly if viewed against a dark background) by the almost silvery appearance of the secondaries, contrasting sharply against the blackish body. This is generally a high-altitude swift occurring in the western and central highlands from 1500 to 2500 m. It breeds on cliffs or in holes in large forest trees, generally during the cold July–August period. Whether it is present in Kenya all year round is open to some speculation, particularly as it is a migrant over much of its African range.

Forbes-Watson's Swift (*A. berliozi*) is a scarce and little known migrant from northern Somalia to the Kenya coast from November–February. While similar in size (16.5 cm) and colour to the eastern race of the Eurasian swift, its most

prominent field character is its conspicuous whitish throat, face and forehead, giving it a noticeable 'white-faced' appearance in flight. Sadly little is known about its movements in Kenya, but there are several records from the Gede/ Watamu/Mida Creek area south to the Shimba Hills National Park.

3. Scarce and Palm Swifts

These are two fast-flying, slender all-brown swifts with long, deeply-forked tails. The **Scarce Swift** (*Schoutedenapus myoptilus*) (16.5 cm) occurs over many areas of the western and central highlands, being most numerous around Mt. Kenya. It appears almost entirely dark brown, with a fast erratic flight, and much flapping of wings. The **Palm Swift** (*Cypsiurus parvus*) (13 cm) behaves similarly, but is small, pale greyish-brown in colour and even more slender and long-tailed than the Scarce Swift. As its name implies it is largely confined to areas with palm trees, on which it nests, being particularly common in the coastal lowlands. Except in the Nairobi area there is no overlap of their ranges, so identification should be relatively easy.

4. Little, Horus and White-rumped Swifts

These are three small 'white-throated and white-rumped' swifts, often occurring in or around towns and villages.

The **Little Swift** (*A. affinis*) (13 cm) is a common and gregarious urban breeding bird, locally abundant in many towns and cities with breeding colonies under the eaves of buildings or bridges. Its square-tipped tail easily separates it in flight from the other two forked-tailed species.

The **White-rumped Swift** (*A. caffer*) (14 cm) has a long slender, deeply-forked tail and breeds beneath bridges or under the eaves of buildings in old nests of Red-rumped and Striped Swallows. It is widespread over much of Kenya, though never occurring in large numbers, unlike the other two species.

The **Horus Swift** (*A. horus*) (13 cm) is an inter-tropical migrant, occurring as a breeding visitor from March-September, particularly in the central Rift Valley. There it breeds in large colonies in earth banks, quarries and gorges, frequently taking over tunnels vacated by bee-eaters, kingfishers and martins. While its tail is not as deeply forked as in the White-rumped Swift, and can look nearly square, its white throat patch is considerably larger and extends onto the upper breast. It is commonly found in and around eroded gullies and gorges from Narok to the Nakuru area, often in association with White-fronted Bee-eaters.

5. The **Alpine Swift** (*A. melba*) is a large (21 cm) and unmistakable dark brown swift with white underparts crossed by a broad brown breast band. It frequently associates with other high flying swifts, generally not far from the alpine peaks of Mts Elgon, Kenya and Kilimanjaro.

6. Finally we come to the three distinctive **spinetails**, all of which are associated with forested habitats.

Sabine's Spinetail (*Rhaphidura sabini*) (11.5 cm) is a rare, white-bellied, white-tailed species, with fluttery flight. It was formerly found over much of western Kenya, but nowadays with ever-decreasing habitat remaining, it is only occasionally recorded over the Kakamega and Nandi forests.

Böhm's Spinetail (*Neafrapus boehmi*) (10 cm) is a small, almost tail-less species, also with a white belly and a broad white rump patch. Its distinctive slow, fluttery almost 'bat-like' flight over woodland and forest easily identifies it. Locally common at the coast and in the Kitui-Kibwezi areas, it favours areas with large numbers of baobab trees.

The **Mottle-throated Spinetail** (*Telacanthura ussheri*) (14 cm) is the largest of the spinetails and looks more like a typical swift. However, it can be easily identified from the White-rumped and Horus Swifts, which with its white rump and pale throat it most resembles, by the presence of a narrow white band across the vent. It too favours areas with baobab trees, and as such occurs mainly in the eastern half of the country including the coastal lowlands.

Children's section

LITTLE SWIFT
Kiliwiliwi, kiliwiliwi,
They twitter as they fly
higher and higher
in the freedom of the sky!
Swift owners of the air
Feeding on the wing
Yet come to earth to nest
On walls of my building.

Poem by Fleur Ng'weno
Drawing by Arabron Osanya-Nyynéque

Elsamere Conservation Centre

Tucked away at the southern end of Lake Naivasha, facing Hippo Point, is Elsamere. This residential conservation centre provides comfortable accommodation and board for naturalists, researchers and conservationists, and for small groups wishing to hold seminars related to conservation.

Elsamere is the former home of painter and author Joy Adamson, who recounted in a series of books her relationship with Elsa the lioness and her cubs. Elsamere is now a lasting tribute to Joy's memory. The house has been left much as she knew it, but additions provide accommodation for up to 15 people in seven double rooms and one single. Elsamere is not an hotel, but anyone with a genuine conservation interest is welcome to stay.

Elsamere is located beside Lake Naivasha, amid lush green lawns and soaring yellow *Acacia* trees that shelter a great variety of birdlife: more than 210 species have so far been recorded. A troupe of Black-and-White Colobus monkeys is resident, and hippo graze the lawns at night. Much of the centre's 23 hectares is being left untouched for naturalists to study and enjoy. Nature trails have been developed around the property, providing delightful walks, and boats can be hired from the Elsamere jetty to explore the lake itself from the water. Other features of the centre are the Joy Adamson Memorial Room, a library of Africana and natural history books, a collection of wildlife films that can be viewed on request, and a suitably equipped laboratory for research work. A short distance up the hill from the main centre is the Field Study Centre, in charge of a full-time Education Executive, which provides a lecture room and simple accommodation and catering for 16 people.

Elsamere's peaceful and beautiful environment can also be enjoyed by those wishing to make a shorter visit. The Joy Adamson Memorial Room, lake frontage and nature trails are open to the public each afternoon from 3–6 p.m. The entrance fee includes afternoon tea on the lawns.

For more information, or to make a booking, contact: *The Warden, Elsamere Conservation Centre, Moi South Lake Rd., P O Box 1497, Naivasha.*

Profile in Action: Henry Ndede

Fleur Ng'weno
P O Box 42271, Nairobi

For most of us on the annual waterbird counts, Elsamere Field Study Centre is "home away from home". We remember the thrilling cries of fish eagles, the sweet notes of tropical boubous, the graceful curves of yellow-barked acacias, and the tall, welcoming figure of Henry Ndede. The counts and the centre have

grown up in three years, waterbird counting now expanded to nearly a dozen lakes and ponds, and Naivasha firmly placed on the map of environmental education in Kenya.

Elsamere Field Study Centre and Henry Ndede, its education executive, have become practically synonymous, having started work together. Located on the hillside above Elsamere, home of the late Joy Adamson, the centre is funded by the Elsa Conservation Trust that she established. Today it is blossoming with audio-visual aids, a computer, a bird feeding table, and Ndede organizes workshops for teachers and students from all over Kenya, and for conservation educators from East Africa and beyond.

"Birds are indicators of the diversity around here," says Ndede. "Some 500 bird species have been recorded in the Naivasha-Kinangop area. That's almost half the total for Kenya, and it's a good way to start people looking at the environments around the lake."

Henry Ndede was born in Kisumu, Kenya, then lived in both Tanzania and Kenya. First of all he wanted to be a doctor, but his interest turned to ecology as he read Botany, Zoology and Education at Kenyatta University. "Ecology was never boring," he notes, and particularly remembers the inspiration given by his professors Patrick Denny and Len Newton. Teaching forms five and six before the coming of the 8-4-4 system, he learned first hand what teachers lack and of the need to integrate environmental issues into the school curriculum.

"What I enjoy most at Elsamere is the challenge to be creative," Ndede explains. "I've learned a lot from experience, from failures as well as successes. I've been able to develop some unique programmes, and it's very rewarding to create activities and see them work."

His willingness to listen is one of the keys to Ndede's success as an educator. He does not assume that he has all the answers, and allows the participants to work towards their own understanding. Together with a lot of field trips, hands-on activities and field observations, it enables the participants to internalize what they learn.

Today more than half the students who visit the centre are in primary school, aged 9 to 12, and Ndede is working on a field study guide for kids. It will include a lot of observations, drawings and other activities that introduce a curious child to the environment — as well as the scientific method. Currently Ndede is testing a set of pictures to help children identify the birds around the Centre.

"My own interest in birds really started here at Elsamere. Joy Adamson had some tamed Verreaux' Eagle Owls that still lived in the acacias when I arrived. It reminded me of stories about evil owls I had heard as a child, and I wanted to learn more to resolve the conflict between these viewpoints. I attended a workshop on birds of prey, and I was hooked!"

Threatened birds of Kenya
3. Great Crested Grebe

Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

Grebes are among the world's most threatened groups of birds. At least five of the 22 recent species are red-listed, and two of these are almost certainly extinct. Compared to some other species, however, the Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* is doing reasonably well — on a global scale. The European race *cristatus*, once persecuted for the plume trade, has bounced back this century and is now fairly abundant. In Australia the race *australis* is uncommon but not declining (although it is under threat in New Zealand, where only about 250 birds remain). Unfortunately things look less bright for the African race *infuscatus*. This bird has always been uncommon but in recent years has suffered a dramatic population crash. In Kenya now it is a highly threatened species that seems to be well on the way to local extinction.

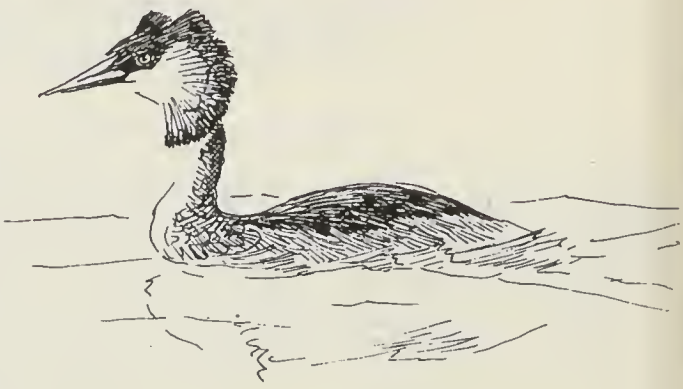
Great Crested Grebes are elegant birds that swim low in the water, easily recognised by their long slim neck, long pointed beak and (in breeding condition) the black crest and conspicuous rufous and black ear 'tippets'. The tippets form a type of a ruff that is often spread around the head. In non-breeding plumage the top of the head and the hind-neck are dark and the throat contrasting white. African birds differ from the European sub-species in lacking a white stripe over the eye: the entire top of the head is dark.

Great Crested Grebes feed mainly on fish, sometimes quite large ones, which they pursue underwater in chases that may last half a minute or more. They will also take a range of other aquatic creatures, including frogs, insects and crustaceans. Their preferred habitat is large open lakes edged with reeds or sedge. Cool water is essential: in eastern Africa the birds are confined to the highlands, and they only descend to sea level at the temperate southern tip of the continent.

Great Crested Grebes breed on an anchored platform of floating vegetation. This appears to be the only time the birds emerge from the water: they rest and sleep while still afloat. In Europe the species is known to have a series of elaborate courtship displays, and these probably occur in Africa too although information is incomplete. One of the most spectacular is the 'weed ceremony', performed by members of a well-established pair. The birds swim away from each other ceremoniously, slowly submerging as they make a twanging call. After a few seconds they resurface with a beakful of weeds and move quickly towards each other, then suddenly rise up vertically, breast to breast, rocking their heads from side to side in a graceful dance.

Like other fish-eating grebes, the Great Crested has the odd habit of devouring

its own feathers. These end up in the main compartment of the stomach, where they decompose to form a spongy green felt. This material wraps around spiky fish bones and protects the stomach; it may also help to prevent parasitic infections.



Great Crested Grebe — *Simon Thomsett*

In East Africa the Great Crested Grebe was once fairly widespread in highland areas, and locally abundant. However, there have been no reports from Uganda for half a century, and its status in Tanzania is unclear. In Kenya its stronghold was the central Rift Valley from Ngong to Solai, with large numbers present at Naivasha and (after the introduction of fish) Nakuru. As late as the 1970s breeding was regularly reported at suitable sites. During the 1980s the species declined steadily in numbers and no breeding was seen. However, by 1990 a dozen or more were still generally present at Lake Nakuru. This had declined to three in July 1991 and none by January 1992. On the main lake at Naivasha, no more than one bird has been recorded during the last three January counts, although small numbers are still regular on Oloidien. One or two birds also turn up periodically on smaller dams and lakes elsewhere, but there is no evidence of breeding. It has been estimated that there are probably fewer than 50 Great Crested Grebes left in Kenya.

All wetland birds face the problem of a disappearing and changing habitat. This has no doubt contributed to the decline of the Great Crested Grebe, but there is an important additional factor: the increasing use of gill-nets for fishing. The birds seem to pursue fish caught in the nets, are themselves trapped underwater and rapidly drown. Soon after the introduction of gill-nets at Naivasha there were reports of nets being raised full of drowned grebes, and the population decline appears to date from this time. Lakes Nakuru and Oloidien are not fished, and provide some refuge; but they are lakes with open grassy shores that do not offer good breeding habitat.

Can the Great Crested Grebe be saved in Kenya? It is hard to tell, since we still know very little about the birds and their movements, or if there are any suitable breeding sites left. More information is urgently needed. If you see a Great Crested Grebe, please report it, with details, to *Kenya Birds*!

Acknowledgement. I am indebted to Don Turner for historical information on the Great Crested Grebe in East Africa.

Events and Announcements

Morning **Bird Walks** led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich continue every Wednesday. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

Kenya Wetlands Working Group **Waterbird Count** at Lake Nakuru, 3–4 July 1993. Contact the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya.

East Africa Natural History Society. All birders in East Africa should join this Society, which offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus. Sub-committees of the Society include the OS-c and BirdLife Kenya. The EANHS also organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 742131/61, ext. 278, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday morning (except Wednesday) and Wednesday afternoon.

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the OS-c and can be obtained from the OS-c Hon. Treasurer and Secretary Don Turner, P.O. Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). The annual subscription is KSh 250 (KSh 260 up-country); overseas rates available from Don Turner. Records are welcomed for the East African Bird Report which forms the third issue of *Scopus*.

BirdLife Kenya offers for sale notelets (showing attractive pen and ink drawings by Dale Zimmerman), postcards (showing the endemic birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in a painting by Norman Arlott) and T-shirts (with a Crowned Eagle motif by Simon Thomsett). These are available from the Department of Ornithology and the EANHS office. The proceeds go to bird conservation projects.

International Birdwatch '93, 9–10 October 1993. BirdLife Kenya is organising Kenyan participation in this fund-raising event which will involve up to a million people around the world in a giant weekend birdwatch. If you are interested in joining in as a birdwatcher or helping to organise, please contact the Dept. Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya *or* Jean Hartley on tel. 581157, P O Box 14098 Nairobi.

The **African Crane and Wetland Training Workshop** will be held in Maun, Botswana, from 8–15 August 1993. For more information contact Cecilia Gichuki at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya.

Contacts. For BirdLife Kenya, Kenya Wetlands Working Group and the EANHS Nest Record Scheme, as well as queries concerning *Kenya Birds*, write to Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131–4 / 742161–4 extension 243.

Thanks to the Elsa Conservation Trust
for their support of this issue

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